

# NEWS AND NOTES FOR FLORIDA VETERANS

Veterans Service Center, VA Regional Office  
St. Petersburg, FL

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The "News and Notes for Florida Veterans" is published monthly by the Veterans Service Center, VA Regional Office, St. Petersburg, Florida, to provide information on VA benefit programs to veterans and dependents in Florida. The material presented does not have the effect of laws or regulations. Please send questions or comments on this newsletter to Veterans Service Center, ATTN: "News and Notes," PO Box 1437, St. Petersburg, FL 33731. We do not have the resources to maintain a mailing list for distribution to individuals; however this newsletter is available on the St. Petersburg VA Regional Office web site at [www.vba.va.gov/ro/south/spete](http://www.vba.va.gov/ro/south/spete).

**GULF WAR TASK FORCE REPORT ANNOUNCED** (VA News Release) The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) Gulf War Veterans' Illnesses Task Force has nearly completed a comprehensive report that will redefine how VA addresses the pain and suffering of ill veterans who deployed during the Gulf War in 1990 and 1991. The mission of VA's Gulf War Task Force is to identify gaps in services as well as opportunities to better serve veterans of the Gulf War. The chairman of the Gulf War Task Force is John R. Gingrich, Chief of Staff at VA and retired Army officer who served during the Gulf War.

Of the almost 700,000 service members who deployed to Operation Desert Shield in 1990 and Operation Desert Storm in 1991, there have been 300,000 Gulf War veterans with claims decisions, over 85 percent were granted service connection for at least one condition, and over 14 percent were not granted service connection for any condition.

VA's Gulf War Task Force recommendations build on the findings from the 2008 VA Research Advisory Committee on Gulf War Illnesses. The Task Force's recommendations include:

Improve data sharing with Department of Defense to notify veterans of potential exposures, monitor their long-term health and inform them about decisions regarding additional follow up.

Improve the delivery of benefits to veterans with Gulf War-related disabilities by reviewing, and if necessary, updating regulations affecting Gulf War veterans.

Expanding training for VBA examiners on how to administer disability claims with multiple known toxin exposure incidents.

Improve VA healthcare for veterans through a new model of interdisciplinary health education and training.

Increase number of long term, veteran-focused studies of veterans to enhance the quality of care VA provides.

Transition from reactive to proactive medical surveillance to help better manage veterans' potential hazardous exposures.

Find new treatments for Gulf War veterans through new research.

Enhance outreach to provide information and guidance to veterans about benefits and services available to them for injuries/illnesses associated with Gulf War service.

For more information on the VA Gulf War Veterans Illness Task Force see  
[http://www.va.gov/Gulf\\_War\\_Background\\_Brief.pdf](http://www.va.gov/Gulf_War_Background_Brief.pdf)

**NEW HEADSTONE DEVICE** Public Law 110-157 allows the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) to furnish a Government headstone or marker for the graves of eligible veterans who died on or after November 1, 1990, regardless of whether the grave is already marked with a privately purchased headstone or marker. The law also gives VA authority to "furnish, upon request, a medallion or other device of a design determined by the Secretary to signify the deceased's status as a veteran, to be attached to a headstone or marker furnished at private expense." This benefit will be available in lieu of a Government furnished headstone or marker for veterans in privately marked graves who died on or after November 1, 1990.

In accordance with the law, VA is currently designing a medallion to be affixed to an existing privately purchased headstone or marker to signify the deceased's status as a veteran. It is estimated this new medallion will be available by April 30, 2010. VA will begin accepting claims once a contract has been awarded for its manufacture. Updated information and claim instructions will be posted at <http://www.cem.va.gov/hm/hmtype.asp>.

There is no change in eligibility for veterans in unmarked graves. Regardless of the date of death, VA will furnish, at no charge to the applicant, a Government headstone or marker for the unmarked grave of any eligible veteran in any cemetery around the world.

**WEB SITE OFFERS SINGLE ACCESS POINT FOR WOUNDED WARRIORS** (VA News Release)

WASHINGTON — The federal departments of Veterans Affairs, Labor and Defense unveiled an improved Web site for wounded warriors. The National Resource Directory is a comprehensive, free, online tool for wounded, ill and injured service members, veterans and their families. Visitors to the site can find an extensive range of information about veterans' benefits, including disability and pension benefits, VA health care and educational opportunities. The site also provides information for those who care for veterans, such as access to emotional, financial and community assistance.

The Web site has been enhanced to provide a single point of access to a wealth of information from more than 10,000 sites by federal, state and local governments and organizations offering services for wounded warriors. A recent addition to the Web site is a specialized section where users can find help for homeless veterans. These resources will help end veteran homelessness over the next five years.

The new design will help visitors find needed resources easily. Other enhancements include a fast, accurate search engine; a "bookmark and share" capability that allows users to share valuable resources on Facebook, Twitter and other social media sites; and a news feature with updates on relevant information and events. Resources are added daily.

Visit the site at [www.nationalresourcedirectory.gov](http://www.nationalresourcedirectory.gov).

**VA EDUCATION CALL CENTER AGAIN OPERATING FIVE DAYS A WEEK** (VA News Release) WASHINGTON – The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) announced that the Education Call Center, closed on Thursdays and Fridays over the past two months, is again operating five days a week. By temporarily reassigning call center employees on Thursdays and Fridays to process Post-9/11 GI Bill claims, VA was able to complete a significant number of education claims from mid-December through mid-February. VA's goal was always to return call center employees to their permanent duties.

The decision to supplement claims processing staff by the call center employees was a key factor in meeting VA's aggressive processing goal of Post-9/11 GI Bill claims. As of mid-February 2010, VA's capacity to process Post-9/11 GI bill claims jumped from an average of 2,000 a day in August 2009 to 7,000 a day. In December when the decision was made to redirect phone agents to claims processing, the number of pending claims was almost 80,000 and timeliness measures were extremely high. The inventory of education claims was driving call volume at the call center to an all time high of 1.26 million call attempts during November. That is why in mid-December 2009 VA temporarily reassigned employees at the VA Education Call Center on Thursdays and Fridays, the lowest call volume days, to help process education benefit claims.

**VA FACILITIES ADDRESSES AND TELEPHONE NUMBERS:**

**SUICIDE PREVENTION 1-800-273-8255**

**VA Regional Office, St. Petersburg** - PO Box 1437, St. Petersburg, FL 33731 1-800-827-1000

**Regional Processing Office, Atlanta, GA** (education claims) - PO Box 100022, Decatur, GA 30031-7022 1-888-GIBILL1 (442-4551)  
Telephone number for Chapter 30 self-verifications 1-877-823-2378

**VA EFT Information Hotline** (electronic funds transfer - direct deposit) 1-877-838-2778

**Veterans Health Administration Toll-Free Hotline** (medical care) - 1-877-222-8387

**VA Health Revenue Service** (information on amounts owed to VA Medical Centers) 1-866-793-4591

**VA Insurance Center, Philadelphia** (VA Insurance) - PO Box 42954, Philadelphia, PA 19101 1-800-669-8477

**VA Health Administration Center** (CHAMPVA and Spina Bifida health care) -  
CHAMPVA inquiries: PO Box 65023, Denver, CO 80206-5023  
CHAMPVA claims: PO Box 65024, Denver, CO 80206-5024  
Spina Bifida inquiries and claims: PO Box 65025, Denver, CO 80206-5025 1-800-733-8387

**National Cemeteries**

10,000 Bay Pines Blvd N, Bay Pines FL 727-398-9426  
6502 SW 102nd Ave, Bushnell FL 352-793-7740  
6501 S State Rd 7, Lake Worth, FL 561-649-6489  
4083 Lannie Rd, Jacksonville FL 904-766-5222  
Naval Air Station, Pensacola FL 850-453-4108/4846  
9810 State Hwy 72, Sarasota FL 877-861-9840  
104 Marine St, St Augustine FL 352-793-7740

**National Cemetery Administration Office of Memorial Programs** (headstones and markers) - 5109 Russell Rd Quantico VA 22134-3903 1-800-697-6947

**Loan Guaranty Eligibility Center** (certificates of eligibility) PO Box 20729, Winston-Salem, NC 27120 1-888-244-6711

**Telecommunications Device for the Deaf (TDD) Unit** - Chicago VA Regional Office 1-800-829-4833

**INTERNET SITES OF INTEREST:**

**VA Web Site:** [www.va.gov](http://www.va.gov)

**VA Web Automated Reference Materials System (WARMS)** [www.warms.vba.va.gov](http://www.warms.vba.va.gov)

**St. Petersburg VA Regional Office:** [www.vba.va.gov/ro/south/spete](http://www.vba.va.gov/ro/south/spete)

**Property Management (sale of VA-reposessed homes):** <http://va.reotrans.com/>

**Federal employment:** [www.usajobs.opm.gov](http://www.usajobs.opm.gov)

**Florida Dept of Veterans Affairs:** [www.floridavets.org](http://www.floridavets.org)

**"Florida Vets First:"** [www.FloridaVetsFirst.com](http://www.FloridaVetsFirst.com)

**Library of Congress (information on pending legislation)** [thomas.loc.gov](http://thomas.loc.gov)